

**Statement of Patricia de Stacy Harrison
President and CEO, Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, House Committee on Appropriations
May 10, 2024**

Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Cuellar, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of America's public media service, reaching nearly 99 percent of the American people. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) requests funding of \$56 million in FY 2024 for the Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Federal Assistance Grants account. CPB is grateful for the important support of this grant program in FY 2024. Sustained support of the program will expand its impact to more communities and extend public media's contributions to public safety.

CPB is a private nonprofit whose operations have been funded by Congress since its creation in 1967. It serves as the steward of the federal government's investment in public media by overseeing the distribution of funds to nearly 550 public broadcasting grantees whose infrastructure provides the broadest nationwide communications platform. CPB has demonstrated over its nearly 60-year history responsible and effective stewardship of federal funds. Its stewardship is further strengthened through oversight from and accountability to an independent inspector general, a presidential-appointed and Senate-confirmed board of directors, and ultimately, Congress and the American people.

With funding from Congress, public broadcasting has largely achieved the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967's "universal service" mandate, reaching 99 percent of the American public. In rural and remote areas, public media is often the only source of local news and public safety information. Further, native-owned public media stations serve some of the most remote and least connected areas in the nation. Beyond providing access, public media is a trusted source of information – an invaluable asset in an age of media skepticism.

Further, through its local stations, public media plays a unique and indispensable role in our nation's civic and public safety infrastructure, providing educational and informational resources to the public free of charge and commercial free. As some of the last locally operated media and communications outlets, public broadcasting stations are active partners in supporting their communities' safety needs. Stations partner with state and local emergency management agencies to advance health, safety, and disaster preparedness campaigns; distribute emergency alerts and provide ongoing information from local officials during natural disasters, severe weather, and other crises; utilize their technology and infrastructure to offer law enforcement and emergency managers innovative communications tools; and create platforms for community recovery through local town halls and issue forums.

With a national-local structure, public media entities can distribute national, state, and regional emergency alerts, and provide encrypted, geotargeted alerts to local communities in times of need. Nationally, the public television interconnection system serves as a distribution point for PBS WARN, an essential part of FEMA's nationwide Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system. Between January 1, 2023, and January 1, 2024, nearly 8,500 WEAs were issued

by federal, state, and local authorities and transmitted over the PBS WARN system throughout the country, demonstrating the widespread utility of this life-saving technology.

PBS leverages its contributions to the WEA system through its “Eyes on IPAWS” tool, providing public safety officials with increased transparency of issued alerts. PBS also developed warn.pbs.org, a website that displays active alerts across the country with the ability to filter alerts based on alert type, location, and keyword searches and a look-back feature for expired and cancelled alerts. Emergency managers use these tools daily to identify active WEAs nationwide; confirm transmission, coverage area, and content of issued WEAs; gain awareness of WEAs issued by other agencies; and filter and view alerts.

Like public television’s contributions to emergency alerts, the Public Radio Satellite System® (PRSS), managed by NPR, supports secure, reliable communications during emergencies without relying on the Internet, which may be offline during emergencies. PRSS receives a national EAS feed directly from FEMA and distributes Presidential emergency alerts to 1,241 public radio stations nationwide, including NPR member and non-member stations. NPR/PRSS is also named as a resource in at least 20 states’ emergency plans, according to the FCC. Many of the public radio stations in these states serve as Primary Entry Point (PEP) stations. This vast national network supports secure, reliable communications during emergencies without relying on the Internet, which may be offline or unreliable.

In addition to text alerts, CPB and NPR have helped local public radio stations implement MetaPub technology so that stations can send contextual images simultaneously with their live radio broadcasts. The technology allows stations to direct emergency alert information to their listeners about earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, and public health emergencies to mobile devices, smart car dashboards, and other digital platforms. For example, stations utilizing MetaPub can geotarget specific listeners and share a tornado’s location, path, and speed at the street and block level and visually convey the information on a radio display for those without map access.

While public media stations can and do play a vital role in public safety, many face financial challenges in meeting their equipment needs. In the first round of grant funding for the NGWS program, CPB received nearly 270 applications from stations in 49 states and the Virgin Islands, requesting approximately \$150 million in funding for projects that would support their ability to deliver public safety information in their communities.

Additional financial support for the NGWS program will help address public broadcasting stations’ financial needs in securing equipment that advances their public safety capabilities. Specifically, the \$56 million requested in NGWS grant funds will enable public media stations to:

1. Enhance the capacity of national public media organizations and local broadcast stations to receive, broadcast, and redistribute emergency alert messages using the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Common Alerting Protocol specifications;
2. Enhance technology infrastructure to enable new, enhanced broadcast services that improve the distribution of public alerts and warnings and strengthen infrastructure resilience with emergency generators and other equipment;

3. Expand the delivery and distribution of emergency alert messages from IPAWS to fill gaps in alert and warning delivery in underserved areas;
4. Enable training of station personnel to install and work with upgraded equipment and software; and
5. Strengthen existing situational awareness tools, such as Eyes on IPAWS, to meet the evolving needs of emergency managers.

Previous funding from the NGWS grant demonstrates how the program can provide financial resources to support public media's role in public safety. One grant recipient, Indian River State College of Fort Pierce, Florida, licensee of IRSC Public Media, received funding to purchase and install an HD transmission line and antenna to a tower in Okeechobee, Florida, a rural community vulnerable to hurricanes and flooding from Lake Okeechobee, and is currently underserved by public safety communications.

Congress' continued support for the Next Generation Warning System program will enable CPB to provide grant funding to more public broadcasting stations, including those serving rural and tribal communities. These projects will reinforce stations' current contributions and deploy new emergency communications tools that enhance local public safety.

Public media infrastructure serves as a vital part of our nation's emergency communications system. With support from this subcommittee and this Congress, it can continue to play a reliable role in providing timely, accurate, life-saving information to communities across the country. Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Cuellar, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of America's public media system. I appreciate your consideration of CPB's funding request.